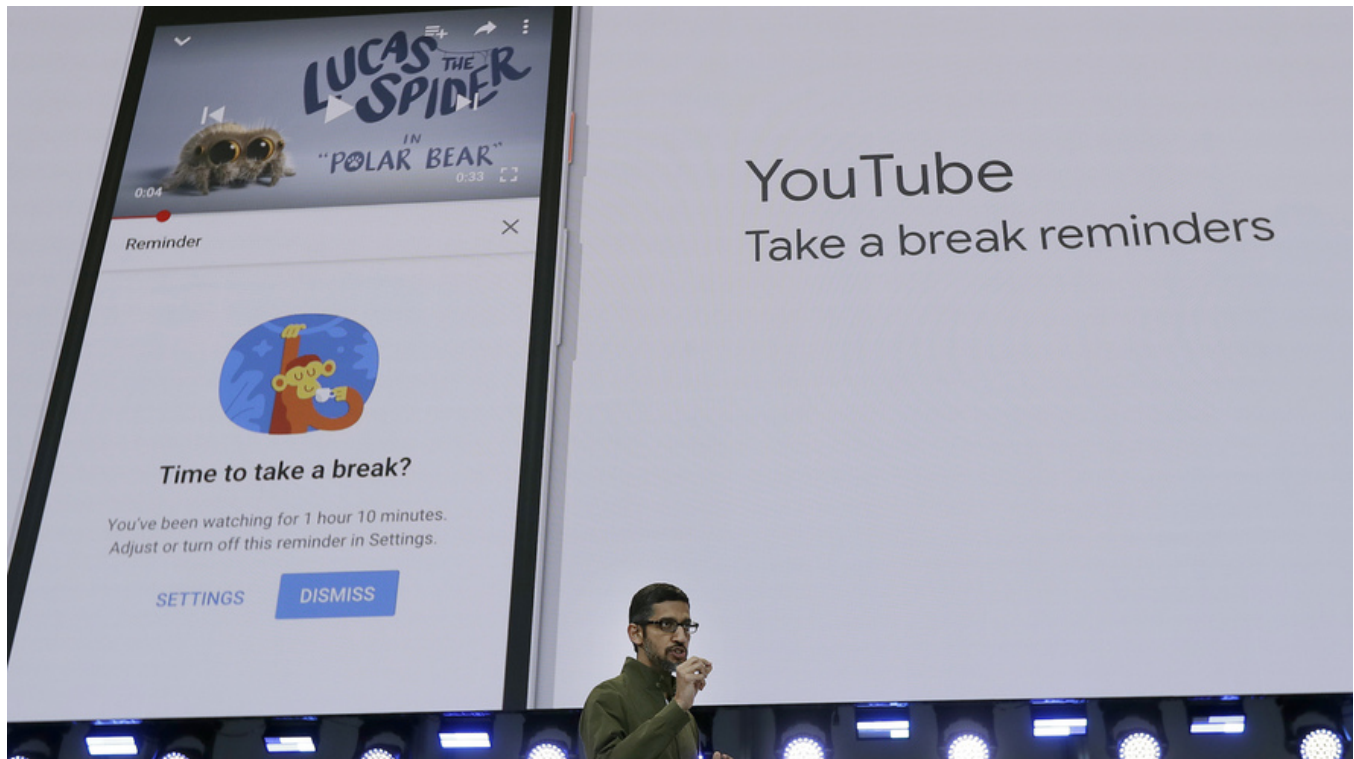


# Google will offer new artificial intelligence to help people unplug

By Agence France-Presse, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.24.18

Word Count **745**

Level **1050L**



Google CEO Sundar Pichai speaks about YouTube's break reminders at the Google I/O conference in Mountain View, California, May 8, 2018. Photo by: AP Photo/Jeff Chiu

Google revealed its latest version of Google Assistant on Tuesday, May 8. The new, improved tool incorporates advances in artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence is a field of computer science that focuses on helping machines "think" and learn. It makes it possible for machines to perform tasks that previously only humans could do.

Google's new digital assistant is capable of handling routine tasks — such as making restaurant bookings. Google says it will help people spend more time away from their smartphone screens.

The new tool was introduced at Google's annual developers conference. Google chief executive Sundar Pichai said it has the potential to free people from everyday chores.

## **Ask Your Google Assistant To Do It**

Pichai played a recording of the Google Assistant independently calling a hair salon and a restaurant to make bookings. The staff in both places didn't realize they were dealing with artificial intelligence software, rather than a real customer.

Say you tell the Google Assistant to book a table for four at 6:00 p.m. It will make the phone call for you, using a human-sounding voice complete with "ums" and "likes." Then it will send you a message with the details.

"Our vision for our assistant is to help you get things done," Pichai told the conference.

"It turns out that a big part of getting things done is making a phone call."

Pichai said the new Google Assistant will allow people to spend more time away from their phone screens. It also will help them develop a healthier relationship to their digital devices.

## **Spending More Time Offline**

To encourage people to spend more time offline, a dashboard shows how much time a person has spent on their devices. It also shows how often their devices are unlocked.

Google also plans to add a "shush" mode, which will switch smartphones to a do-not-disturb mode when they are placed face down on a table.

Many of us feel glued to our phones, Pichai said. We "worry about what we'll miss if we're not connected." Google wants "to help people find the right balance and gain a sense of digital wellbeing," he said.

According to Pichai, YouTube watchers will be able to set a pop-up message to remind them to take breaks from viewing. YouTube is owned by Google.

"This is going to be a deep, ongoing effort across all our platforms," Pichai said. "To help you understand habits, focus on what matters, switch off and wind down."

## **Hey Google ...**

Google Assistant is also being taught to better understand people and interact with them more naturally. It will be getting new voices, including one based on the voice of singer John Legend, and new programming that will improve conversation performance.

"Thanks to our progress in language understanding, you'll soon be able to have a natural back-and-forth conversation with the Google Assistant," Pichai said. You will no longer have to repeat "Hey Google" for each follow-up request, he said.

The tech industry, which is based largely in Northern California's Silicon Valley area, has recently faced a wave of bad publicity. Among other things, major companies have been criticized for enabling the spread of misinformation.

At Tuesday's conference, Pichai addressed that issue head on.

## **Technology As A Positive Force**

"It's clear that technology can be a positive force and improve the quality of life for billions of people around the world," he said. "But it's equally clear that we can't just be wide-eyed about what we create."

He added that "we feel a deep sense of responsibility to get this right."

Pichai said the company is making major changes to Google News. The effort has put artificial intelligence to work finding trusted sources for stories.

"It uses artificial intelligence to bring forward the best of human intelligence — great reporting done by journalists around the globe," Pichai said. The new, improved Google News "will help you stay on top of what's important to you," he said.

The changes to Google News will also address one of the main problems associated with online news. In many cases, people are shown different stories, based on what the provider thinks their beliefs and political opinions are. The result is that many people only read stories that echo what they already believe, and are never exposed to opposing points of view. Many experts feel this had widened political and cultural divisions across the country.

To help correct this serious problem, Google News will show everyone the same stories from now on.